

[In these minutes: Discussion of potential changes in two graduate education policies, discussion of newly-established housing strategy survey]

EDUCATIONAL POLICY COMMITTEE (SCEP) MINUTES

FEBRUARY 11, 2015

[These minutes reflect discussion and debate at a committee of the University of Minnesota Senate; none of the comments, conclusions, or actions reported in these minutes represent the views of, nor are they binding on, the Senate, the Administration, or the Board of Regents.]

PRESENT: Sue Wick (chair), Nicola Alexander, Gifty Amarteifio, Michael Anderson, Elaine Darst, Gayle Golden, Ken Leopold, Keith Mayes, Alon McCormick, Robert McMaster, Rachna Shah.

ABSENT: Noah Hall, Lauren Lindquist.

REGRETS: Erich Beckert, Karla Hemesath, Thomas Michaels, Hamza Musse, Savio Poovathingal, Henning Schroeder, Tisha Turk.

GUESTS: Suzanne Bardouche, Belinda Cheung, Tina Falkner, Leslie Schiff, Stacey Tidball.

1. DISCUSSION OF POTENTIAL CHANGES TO THREE UNIVERSITY-WIDE POLICIES

Belinda Cheung said that prior to 2011 there was no University-wide graduate education policies. Instead, the only policies for graduate students were under the Graduate School. SCEP formed a subcommittee on graduate education policies in 2010 and new policies were approved in 2011. They are now going through their four-year comprehensive review.

A subcommittee of the Graduate Education Council (GEC) was formed last fall and includes four faculty, one graduate student, and two staff members. They started reviewing all the graduate education policies, beginning with the two that have generated many questions since their inception. Any issues that could not be resolved by the subcommittee were sent to the GEC. The two policies here today have received divided comments from GEC members, so she would like SCEP feedback before a final determination is made.

Course Numbering

The course numbering policy which governs all levels of courses at the University. In the policy, pre-thesis credits (8666) are being placed in the same category as master's (8777) and doctoral (8888) thesis credits. It is unclear what pre-thesis credits are and if they should continue to be an available option for graduate students. Some GEC faculty members indicated that pre-thesis credits are meant for students who are not research-ready, have no prerequisites before they can be taken, and are usually taken before preliminary oral exams but some programs allow students to take doctoral thesis credits (8888) before they pass the preliminary oral exam. Some students, after passing their preliminary oral exam, have requested that their pre-thesis credits (8666) be converted to 8888 credits.

The issues for SCEP to consider include categorizing 8666 credits as special registration similar to GRAD 999 and 1-FTE (8444) registration, what the requirements should be for these credits (8666), what credits should count towards thesis credits, and how does the academic mission align with budget implications for graduate students.

Q: Can a student enroll in an 8666 course as a way to rotate through faculty research interests and labs?

A: It is usually used to maintain a student's full-time status and maybe considered as "fillers."

Q: How are students directed to this registration?

A: Preparation for research is very broad and varies greatly by program and student. In some cases it might be appropriate for a student to take a semester to prepare for the preliminary oral exam before beginning dissertation research.

Q: How are faculty involved in 8666 registrations?

A: Unlike directed studies and directed research credits, there is no contract or faculty requirement for these courses, but many still feel that there is value in this type of registration.

Q: How many 8666 courses are taken each semester?

A: It varies by program since some programs require a full semester of preparation for the preliminary oral exam after finishing with course credits.

Q: Is there an instructor listed for 8666 registration?

A: No, unlike thesis credits which do have a faculty of record as they relate to a student's advisor.

Q: What was the GEC's response to eliminating 8666 registration?

A: There has been pushback from programs that do not allow a student to take thesis credits before completing the preliminary oral exam. The GEC questioned the academic message which will be sent to students in some programs if the 8666 registration is eliminated since it will push students to take their preliminary oral exam earlier or register for course credits that may have limited values to them in order to maintain full-time status.

Q: Does the college or program determine at what point in a program thesis credits can be earned?

A: Final approval lies with the college so a program can not make this determination themselves.

Q: Once a student passes their preliminary oral exam, could a certain amount of 8666 credits be accepted in lieu of 8888 credits?

A: This change would need to be reflected on a degree plan.

Q: Is the 8666 option a holdover from when programs did not allow early preliminary oral exams?

A: The issue was brought to SCEP when the policy was created and it was determined that the 8666 option was needed at that time.

Members made the following comments:

- If a student is under guidance of a faculty mentor, then they should register for a directed study credit, not pre-thesis credit

- Student credit equates to time and work done during the semester. Using 8666 registration for filler is inappropriate
- There appear to be different approaches for the use of 8666 registration
- If a student is not research-ready, then they should register for directed study or directed research credits instead, which have a contract between the student and the faculty
- 8666 registration should be removed as an option for students
- Students should not be allowed to receive credit without proper faculty mentoring or oversight
- If students are allowed to take 8888 courses and then fail their preliminary oral exam, what should be done?
- SCEP should think broadly about what is good academic policy in this area
- Students should not be granted conversion of 8666 credits to 8888 credits
- There should be transparency in the credits that a student has taken instead of conversion for a degree plan
- Should programs be allowed to determine if they will count 8666 credits towards 8888 credit requirements?
- 8666 registration should be for students who need extra work. The registration should include a description of what will be done by the student and require faculty oversight. This will make it more like directed study than filler credits.
- How can the University charge for credits when it is not monitoring the deliverables?
- Defining 8666 registration would help to determine when it should be used and when waivers are recorded
- Consistency within a program is key, and there cannot be consistency if registrations are not being monitored and some students are being granted a conversion while others are not aware that this might be an option

Application of Graduate Credits to Degree Requirements

Belinda Cheung said that if the awarding of a Ph.D. is for the product of a student's research, then why are transfer students required to take 12 course credits at the University. This is being asked for faculty hired who bring graduate students with them who are very far along in their degree completion and may have already completed similar coursework at their previous institution. There is a possibility for an exception, but this is done on a case-by-case basis. Should the University abolish the current policy requirement of a minimum of 12 course credit for all doctoral students transferring to the University or should this decision be allowed to be made at the program level?

The arguments for keeping the requirement is that these students are still being awarded a University degree, which means more than the completion of a dissertation. If a student comes from outside, then completion of course credits allows them to become part of a co-hort and learn University culture and values. If the requirement is discontinued, it will allow graduate students to remain isolated instead of being assimilated into a program.

Q: Did the GEC consider lowering the requirement from 12 to six credits?

A: It was discussed but there was a feeling that six credits was too low.

Q: If a credit requirement remains, could courses be taken online to fulfill the requirement?

A: Online courses are less likely at the 8xxx-level.

Q: What is done at peer institutions?

A: It varies. Institutions ranked above the University have more stringent requirements, but the highest-ranked institutions have the most lax requirements.

Members made the following comments:

- Course credits are not what a graduate degree is about and therefore should not be a degree requirement
- Course credits represent the University which is granting the degree
- Without the requirement, a student could transfer late from a non-peer institution and quickly be awarded a University degree
- A student cannot complete 24 thesis credits and six course credits in two semesters, which forces them to remain at the University longer
- What does the University brand mean?
- No institution allows thesis credits to transfer
- There is a difference between a student choosing to switch institutions and a faculty hire bringing graduate students along
- Programs should decide on credit requirements

2. DISCUSSION OF NEWLY-ESTABLISHED HOUSING STRATEGY SURVEY

Vice Provost Robert McMaster said that he and Laurie Scheich are co-chairing a task force this semester to look at student housing since it is a major factor in undergraduate student success. The University was a known commuter campus until about 10 years ago, and during that time it neglected building new facilities on-campus. There was a renewed effort to make the University less of a commuter campus, based on research studies, and several complexes have been built in the last decade – Yudof Hall, Wilkins Hall, and 17th Avenue.

Even with these new facilities, the University is in the bottom of the Big Ten for on-campus beds:

- Michigan State – 18,200 beds (which provides capacity for juniors and seniors)
- Rutgers – 14,000 beds
- Indiana – 12,700 beds
- Wisconsin – 7400 beds
- Nebraska – 7300 beds
- University – 7000 beds
- Iowa – 6229 beds
- Northwestern – 4374 beds

Research is showing that first-year retention and four-year graduation rates increase if a student lives on campus during their first year, and even more if they are able to do so for their first two years. University housing does not have many sophomores due to space constraints and most leave for off-campus options.

A presentation on this topic was made to the Regents in May. The most important detail provided to them was that in predictive models, living on campus is the first factor in determining a student's retention. The goals outlined in the report include:

- Increasing first-year on campus rates from the current 88 percent
- Increasing second-year on-campus rates from the current 22 percent
- Increasing on-campus housing options for transfer students
 - There is a significant demand among these students, which is one reason that 17th Avenue was built

Benefits of on-campus housing include a sense of belonging and purpose, nurtured growth, living and training in communities, flexible contracts, and residential dining.

There have been discussions of requiring first-year students to live on campus unless there is an exemption, if enough beds can be provided and if additional financial aid can be made available. The current 12 percent of students who live off-campus are comprised mostly of PELL-eligible, first-generation, and/or students of color. If there was a requirement to live on-campus, the University would need to be sensitive to cultural and social issues, such as students who must live at home to care for family members. The ideal place to put all first-year students would be the Superblock buildings after some renovations are completed.

The questions still to be answered include:

- How does the Housing and Residential Life strategy align with the University's mission?
- Why should the University provide more housing when it is being done by the private sector? Local and national trends impact the role that the University plays in the housing market.
- Does the University need new residence halls or should it lease private facilities instead?

Q: Does everyone who wants to live on-campus have the option?

A: For first-year students, yes; for upper classmen, possibly since there is such a small number that request this option. But preference is given to first-year students.

Q: Does the University turn away students?

A: Yes, some upper classmen and transfer students.

Q: Single rooms are important to students. Is the University planning to add more of this option?

A: Not in housing designated for freshmen. Singles and suites are options for other students.

Q: Where could new facilities be built?

A: That is one of the main questions. Renovations are being planned for the Superblock which would increase capacity.

Members made the following comments:

- Ohio State instituted a requirement that all sophomores live on campus which required \$400 million in new facilities. Should the University also build to this extent or use private facilities?
- University should develop additional options based on the 17th Avenue model
- University should not require students to live on campus
- Focus should be placed on accommodations for older students to help in retention of sophomore students
- University needs a comprehensive housing strategy, including options for visiting scholars and international visitors
- Off-campus housing does not provide students with help and resources
- Many students think that living at home is a way to cut the cost of college but it usually leads to a longer time to graduation

3. OTHER BUSINESS

With no further business, Professor Wick thanked all members for attending and adjourned the meeting.

Becky Hippert

University Senate